State Dept. Aide Disclaims Knowledge Of Spying on Civilians While at Justice

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Warren M. Christopher, the new No. 2 man in the State Department, yesttrday disclaimed any knowledge of widespread Army surveillance of civilians and groups while he was deputy attorney general from 1967 to '69.

Christopher told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a hearing on his nomination to be deputy secretary of state.

"If I had known about it I feel quite sure I would have protected it, and as I look back on it, I abhor what was done."

After Christopher's testimony, the committee, and then the Senate by voice vote, confirmed his nomination.

Christopher will head a delegation that leaves Sunday for Brazil on a nuclear nonproliferation mission. The United States, concerned about the conversion of nuclear fuel into nuclear bombs, is attempting to induce Brazil to change its plans to buy a complete nuclear fuel cycle system from West Germany.

The questioning of Christopher centered on the disputed Army surveillance of thousands of civilians in the late 1960s, when he was in the Justice Department. Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) led the questioning.

The Army program, originally investigated and condemned by the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, developed during the Johnson administration's attempts to deal with the race riots of 1967-68. Christopher, and Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, who was deputy secretary of defense and later President Johnson's special representative in dealing with the riots, both worked on controlling the disorders in numerous cities, including Washington, D.C.

Christopher said yesterday that "I have no recollection of any discussion in my presence of the Army engaging in covert surveillance."

"If it had been brought up," he said, "I would have bten strongly opposed to it."

Christopher, who had been vice chairman of the California commission that investigated the violence in Watts, said his concern was the need for "a balanced reaction" by Army and National Guard units in dealing with disorders to minimize loss of life. He said he brings to his current post at State, as a result of his experiences, heightened "concern for human rights" and "moral values."

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), who formerly headed the Senate's intelligence committee, said he is concerned about the direction in which the Carter administration appears to be headed on intelligence secrecy.

"In our kind of society," Church said, "secret operations sooner or later are going to surface."

Instead of trying "to curtail the number" of people "who know what is going on," Church said, he would hope the Carter administration would stop "this sordid business of bribing foreign leaders in little countries scattered all over the world."

Church said that is "beneath the dignity of the United States" and "it undermines our moral authority."